

Irvine Farm House
Irvine, Warren County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-525

HABS
PA
62-IRV,
2A.

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Howard Hicks, District Officer
Erie, Pennsylvania

IRVINE FARM HOUSE

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Owner

Miss Margaret Ellis Irvine Newbold.

Date of Erection

Before 1843, possibly 1837-1840.

Architect

Dr. William Armstrong Irvine.

Builder

James M. Halliday.

Present Condition

Poor to fair.

Number of Stories

- A House, two stories main part, one in wings.
- B House, two stories.
- C House, two stories with wings one story.
- D Mansion (not in survey).
- E House, two stories (photograph only).
- F House (not in survey).

Materials of Construction

Sandstone, ashler and rubble, white pine and some cherry.

Other Existing Records

Information and personal recollections furnished by Miss Margaret E. I. Newbold, drawings, photographs, personal inspection.

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Many men in many parts of the world have dreamed of creating empires. Some of these empires were consummated, some of them were begun, many of them fell into the discard of unremembered things. Even in the republic of the United States of America attempts were made to establish what were in the beginning said to be small colonies, and possibly if they had prospered might have been the wedge to split the nation into segments. Incidentally none of the so-called colonies admitted to being anything like attempts to eventually become independent colonies, but ambition always tries for the throne!

From the history of Sherman Day, published in 1843, the following excerpt will give an accurate description of the Irvine Houses, and their location "About six miles below Warren, near the mouth of the Brokenstraw creek, the traveler, who has thus far passed the usual plain log or frame cottage by the roadside, is struck with the appearance of an elegant mansion of stone, of a chaste and neat design, standing a little back from the road, with a fine farm around it, a short distance beyond he sees another, after the same model, adorning a similar farm, a little further on, another still, and near it by the roadside the "Cornplanter Hotel", built of freestone, in a style and of a magnitude that would do honor to Chestnut street, in Philadelphia. Opposite the hotel is a row of stores, in the same styles of architecture, a neat bridge crosses the creek; on one side are wild rocky hills, and on the other the broad alluvial meadows that border the Allegheny. Besides the buildings enumerated above, there is a mill and miller's house, two other elegant stone cottages below the creek; and about a mile below, near the Allegheny is the mansion of the proprietor. This village, intended eventually to become the town of Cornplanter was erected and is owned entirely by Dr. Wm. A. Irvine. It stands on a large tract of fine land inherited from his father, the Commissary-Gen. Callender Irvine, who was the son of Gen. Wm. Irvine of the revolutionary army. The village was built in anticipation of the construction of the Sunbury and Erie railroad; which was located directly through it, and was to pass up the valley." General Calendar Irvine was a great lover and breeder of horses.

The Irvine Tenant Houses are a part of this village. Some of the places which composed this village originally have fallen into ruin, but many of them still remain. The original mansion D, of Dr. William A. Irvine is still intact, located on a bank of the Allegheny River, surrounded by trees, shrubs and lawns, and inhabited by the Misses Margaret and Esther Newbold, two very charming ladies, granddaughters of Dr. William Armstrong Irvine.

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On the walls of this mansion hang the portraits of the Irvines, including General William Callendar and Dr. William Armstrong Irvine. The mansion is of wood, with a wide porch.

A little farther along the road away from the Irvine mansion is located one of the houses of stone, which for identification is called the E house. The farmer's house, is located about a half mile towards Irvine, at the bottom of a hill, near the railroad. A large barn of wood, is also located near this house. The house itself is of stone. This house is designated as A. Another house C is located much farther along the road to Warren, set back in a lane. It is and has been inhabited more recently than the others, and the interior has been kept in better condition. The miller's house is designated as B. This house is located almost directly east about a mile from the farm house. Another house F is located nearer to Warren, Pennsylvania.

Probably it would be a rather difficult task to determine the process of a human mind that would erect structures, and especially so many structures of a similar design in farming country. They appear, from a distance, like the block houses a child erects with his first box of blocks. There is a rectangular central part, alike in them all, and in two of them, wings have been added on each side. In some of them the stone is roughly chiseled, in others it has been carefully smoothed and tooled. The little Presbyterian chapel is a part of this community, also built by Dr. William A. Irvine, and the stone laid up by James M. Halliday, the same mason who did the work on all of the houses.

The farm house designated as House A is located just a few yards from the railroad tracks on what is known as 'the farm'. It faces the east and is a rectangular building with a wing to the north and one to the south sides. These wings extend almost the length of the house, are of one story, while the main building is of two full stories. The house and wings are of sand-stone except the north wall of the north wing which is of wood. The outer walls are 20" thick, not only the outer walls, but also those between the main building and the wings. The north wing is used as a woodshed and has the cellar hatchway located in it, to the right of the door which opens into the main building. The south wing has a recessed porch at the center of the south side in which a door and window opening into the kitchen are located. The porch steps are missing, and the flooring is in bad condition altho the great supporting beams seem to be well preserved. Another window is located in this wing towards the south, and each wing has a window to the east.

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There are only two windows on the west side on the first floor and a cellar window. The window sash on the first floor have been modernized. The windows of the second floor are of irregular sash, the lower of six lights, the upper of nine. The cellar windows to the east are of one sash, two lights.

The main entrance, which is on the east elevation, has a stone head, deeply grooved into six sections with a central keystone, tooled and paneled, in intricate manner. The windows, each have wooden frames with stone sills beneath and tooled stone caps. The step, landing and door sill are of stone. The door is an irregular paneled door, of two small panels at the top, two long panels below and two shorter panels at the bottom. The north and south doors are fashioned similar to the east door.

The water table on the east elevation is of tooled stone. The corners or quoins of the main part of the house are trimmed with random width stone with tooled edges. The central part of the house has a hipped roof covered with wooden shingles. The two wings have shed roofs hipped at one end, also covered with wooden shingles. The main cornice surrounds the rectangular part of the house and is of a fine composition of curved and straight lines, duplicated in the cornices of the wings.

The east or main entrance opens directly into the living room. A door from this room to the south opens into a bedroom located in the south wing. A door to the north opens into a closet located under the stairs. A simple but effective mantel is placed on the west elevation, having neat pilasters of wood (the inner part of this mantel is boarded up), graceful curves on the mantel shelf, with a simple base on the pilasters. The base board of the room is finished with a small neat moulding. Another door in the west elevation leads into the kitchen.

The kitchen has a large fireplace with a mantel and bake oven. There is one door opening to the north into the woodshed and one to the south onto the porch. There is also a door leading into the pantry on the south elevation. The pantry is located in the south wing at the west end of the wing. The stairway to the second floor ascends from the kitchen on the east elevation and is enclosed. The kitchen fire-place is quite large with a bake oven and drying space occupying nearly one half of the left part. The bake oven has an arched brick lining with a brick floor, and is 2' 10" in diameter. Hot coals were taken from the fireplace and placed in the bake oven to use for baking. A main flue connects the oven with the fireplace. The fireplace is made of large stone masonry. The sides of the opening are of one stone each 2' 1" wide 3' 8" high, and 11' stone over top. A wooden mantel is over the fireplace and oven 9' 6" long,

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5' 3" high with a 5" shelf supported by brackets. Above the mantel shelf are horizontal pine boards 3" to 3-1/2" wide to ceiling. The walls and ceiling of the kitchen are lined with pine boards. A cupboard is located on the left side and above the bake oven.

The second floor has two bed rooms and a hall with the stairway. On the second floor the stairwall is encircled with a small rail, with 3/4" square ballusters ending with an octagon newal post measuring about 3" with square base. A brick chimney with brick cap surmounts the roof.

DW 9/4/37